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War Food Administration
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Nutrition Programs Branch

Case History
of a
Nutrition Committee Activity

A STATE MOBILIZES FOR FOOD PRESERVATION 1/

THE PROBLEM

Food rationing made North Carolinians acutely aware that in 1943 money alone would not provide the kinds and amounts of foods they had been accustomed to buying.

Increased food conservation seemed to be the answer. They would get busy and can, dry, and brine food for themselves.

The various agencies working on food and nutrition problems also realize that it was important for food to be conserved at home if the people were to be well fed. Some families had been canning food according to the best scientific methods, but the agencies concerned knew that this number represented only a portion of the group who would now try to can food at home. Many of this new group would be women who had never canned. Others would have canned only fruit which is easy to can. Moreover, some of them would can according to the practices followed by their mothers and grandmothers. Others would ask the neighbors, who might know but little more than the persons asking. Others would accept information from any source. This laissez faire policy had many disastrous possibilities. Greatly needed food might be spoiled. Scarce jars, rubber rings, and sugar might be wasted. Extremely important, many people might become discouraged, if their food spoiled, and never try again - just at a time when the contribution that could be made by home preservation would be most needed by the nation. Even more important, if the spoilage was of a dangerous type not easily detected, food poisoning of serious or fatal nature might result. The agencies concerned with food problems felt that something must be done to teach all these potential canners how to pack products safely.

The responsibility was a load that no one agency could carry. Neither could any one agency hope to reach all the people. Coordination and cooperation would be necessary. All information given out by responsible groups must be the same, to avoid the confusion inherent in any emergency action.

Plans were carefully considered and made. The State Chairman of Civilian Defense, the Directors of Health, Education, Agricultural Extension, Farm Security and others on the State Nutrition Committee considered it necessary to carry out a unified conservation program, aimed to reach every family in towns, villages, and the rural areas of North Carolina with approved, safe methods of canning fruits and vegetables. This was obviously a job which the Nutrition Committee because of its coordinating function was best fitted to sponsor, since the functions of the committee are advisory, not administrative. The State Committee coordinates nutrition activities and keeps its constituent groups informed about the work of various agencies in order to promote unified efforts and avoid duplication.

1/ Adapted from plan and report of North Carolina State Nutrition Committee.

WHAT THEY DID ABOUT IT

The Nutrition Committee planned a 2-day Food Conservation School for professionally trained workers. The school to be held in Raleigh, the State Capital, on the 5th and 6th of March, 1943.

The school was conducted by representatives from the cooperating agencies with demonstrations given by Extension specialists.

The entire State Home Demonstration staff of district agents and specialists; the entire staff of Farm Security workers at the State level, district home supervisors, Vocational Home Economics supervisors; and the food teachers from six colleges, white and Negro, and Home Service Directors of Utility Companies attended the school in Raleigh.

Participants in the Raleigh workshop returned to their counties and districts, and held similar 2-day Food Conservation Schools in the hundred counties in the State. The first day of this second training school was for professionally trained home economists, home economic teachers, Farm Security Home Supervisors, home demonstration agents, and home economists working in other fields.

The second day of the school was for Civilian Defense Zone Lay Leaders, who would, in turn, assist Block Leaders. This learning, and teaching-in-turn was the heart of the plan -- to make sure that every person in North Carolina would know approved safe methods to use when they canned the abundances of the orchards and gardens.

The college teachers returned to their schools and gave their home economics students intensive courses in food preservation, so that they in turn would be ready when they returned to their various homes to teach and help their families and neighbors to can the best way.

UNIFIED INFORMATION ON ALL SIDES

Throughout the entire State, poster committees of the Offices of Civilian Defense arranged exhibits in store windows, carrying announcements of local meetings.

Radio programs gave the same food preservation information that the demonstrators were giving to their audiences. The Newspapers gave this same "decided-upon" accurate information in their columns, again making sure that no conflicting information was spread.

Motion picture theatres ran "slides" calling attention to the need for home food preservation, and gave the addresses of local information centers where printed information could be obtained.

Four hundred key demonstrations were given in the State during the month of April 1943.

Stores cooperated by ordering supplies early, thus assuring communities that jars and rubber rings would be available for canning their earliest garden surpluses.

THE RESULTS OF THIS COORDINATED PLAN

The records show that 85 million containers of food were saved for winter use in North Carolina in 1943. This food was canned, dehydrated, brined or otherwise preserved. Many barrels of food were also safely stored. This was a record. Before 1943 the highest number of filled-containers ever reported in the State was 40 million. Most of the food preserved -- both in kind and quantity -- was preserved according to a planned food budget which had been worked out on the basis of the actual nutritional needs of the families. Thus the whole program became a giant demonstration of the Nutrition Committee's aim -- to build better health through better nutrition.

Large as it was, this saving of 85 million containers of food and the increased nutrition knowledge among the people was not the only result of this nutrition committee's coordinated campaign. Studying the needs of the State quickly showed that the residents of the larger towns and cities had much less access to sources of food conservation information than did the people living in the rural areas. As a result of this study, twenty home demonstration agents were placed in towns and cities in 1943. In 1944 the number was increased.

One large tobacco manufacturer now employs a full time worker to manage a community canning plant for his employees. The employees pay a small toll for the use of the plant and equipment. This toll is used to aid in providing adequate low-cost meals at the Plant's cafeteria.

OPINION OF THE AGENCIES

The administrative heads of the cooperative agencies, who make up the advisory committee of the State Nutrition Committee, said that this coordinated Food Preservation Program was one of the best programs ever carried out in the State. They also said that it could never have been accomplished as the program of any one agency.

